



## Andrea Weaver's Speech for Middlesex Savings Bank Grant Award Nov., 2013

First, a heartfelt thank you to the Board of Trustees of the Middlesex Charitable Foundation for their generous grant to support Bridges Together.

"Think about your earliest memory involving an older adult. Hold that memory in your mind. What were you doing? What were you feeling? What about the older person? Did you learn anything in that moment?" So begins the initial Bridges: Growing Older, Growing Together lesson.

Due to changes in our society, many children and older adults today do not have the opportunity to build meaningful intergenerational relationships. Bridges Together is seeking to change that by educating professionals on how to create these intergenerational opportunities. In addition, we develop and distribute intergenerational curricula that teachers and afterschool directors can easily implement. To prepare for each lesson, the students interview their grandparents or another elder in their circle of love.

The Bridges programs impact many lives.

Last week, I spoke with a mom who shared about the Bridges impact on her family. She said: *My son went thru the Bridges program a few years ago. My in-laws are deceased and my parents live in the Midwest. When we Facetime with my mom, my son doesn't know what to say and he tends to give short answers. But, the Bridges program gave him a structure for his conversations which was so great. Today, my daughter is enjoying the program and comes home excited to tell me about her senior volunteers.*

A woman called to talk with me and shared the impact Bridges has on volunteers and their families. "I'm recently retired from the field of law and am looking for something to do with myself... For more than a dozen years, I've listened to my husband's blow-by-blow account of each lesson. He loves Bridges and thoroughly enjoys the kids. I am sure, I will, too." This woman is one of 10,000 Americans turning 65 every day – people who are looking to volunteer in new and productive ways.

Bridges impacts the choices future adults make. High school students who have been through the Bridges programs have initiated and sustain two ongoing activities at their senior center: Teen Tech Days and a Line Dancing class. These students who experienced the power of older adults while in Bridges several years ago – have now sought out and created opportunities to enjoy the company of seniors while giving back.

Strong intergenerational programs benefit more than just the children and volunteers – there are ripple effects that impact all of their families, teachers, and the larger community – for years to come.

Through this generous grant from the Middlesex Charitable Foundation, teachers and senior center staff in Bedford, Framingham and Littleton will be trained on how to implement the Bridges program and create other such programs. Bridges Together is working with researchers to study the efficacy of Bridges in these communities.

I look forward to reporting back to you in several months on our findings! I am certain that you will hear stories about how Bridges impacts the lives of volunteers, students, their families and teachers.

Fast forward several years, I hope you will hear stories about how these children are working to improve the lives of our older citizens. Thank you, once again, for empowering us at Bridges Together to be an instrument of change, strengthening our communities by bringing children and older adults together.